

1/26/2007

HB354


Mister Chair, Members of the Committee- My name is Lori Ruffier .Who in this room knows how to teach a deaf or hard of hearing child how to read? I am a Special Education Director and School Psychologist. I have a masters in special education, and I have attended every workshop, conference and seminar that I can on deaf education. I can barely sign, and I don't know how to teach a deaf child to read. New special education teachers coming out of college don't know how to teach these children to read. I will give you one example which happens all over our state.

In 1994 a deaf student enrolled in our elementary school in Eureka. My resource teacher came into my office and said, "How am I, going to teach her to read? She can't hear me." I had no clue, so I called the outreach consultants for Montana School for the Deaf and Blind (MSDB). They came up. She needed an interpreter. How do I interview an interpreter? I called MSDB. They came up. She needed to be tested. I am also the school psychologist. How do I test her? That was just a phone call, but they helped me through that. The student needed a special phone to call home in case of an emergency, and again a call to help me through that situation. Next came the Child Study Team meeting and the Individual Education Plan meeting. I was unsure how to provide all the correct services, so they came to Eureka again to help us write the plan. Now the teachers needed training on how to work with an interpreter. Up they came again. Then I lost my interpreter because of a wedding and I needed them again to interview. Let's not even count how many e-mails that were sent, and they had to take the time to answer my concerns. I can't really even tell you how many times that first year I needed an outreach consultant to come to Eureka which is quite a drive. Time with me, time on the road, how can two people service 200 students with all these different aspects of service that are needed? Many schools have this problem, especially the rural ones. The small schools can not provide services to these children without outreach consultants. Directors this week have told me they have to wait weeks to get one of the outreach consultants, and it isn't fair for a child to go without services for weeks. They are already behind educationally due to their deafness, and missed time doesn't help close the gap. If we provide appropriate services which we can, and with the help of outreach consultants, children with deafness and hearing impairment can become productive members of society. It is worth our time and effort to pass this bill on. It will save tax payers money in the long run.

It will not be easy to find the personnel as stated on page 2 line 14. But I think it is very important that we try. It is not easy to find related services personnel to come to our state, such as speech language therapists, occupational therapists, interpreters and deaf education teachers, etc. However we need to provide a free and appropriate education to all students, and they need the services to access their education. I personally have spent hours on phones talking to colleges and job service personnel looking for these specialized individuals. It is possible to fill the positions with hard work.



I believe it is imperative that you pass HB 354 so that special education directors like myself can provide a free appropriate public education to students with deafness and hearing impairment.

  
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